

## Conclusion Unchanged: Smoking Is the Cause of Sex Longevity Differences

Dr. Sowder is correct that male-female longevity differences (MFLD) have increased over the last 60 years and that smoking habits of men and women have become more similar, particularly over the last 20 years. However, this does not mean that smoking is not responsible for the MFLD among adults. One must expect a significant lag between the time male and female smoking habits come together and the time their longevitys coincide. This lag occurs because men have many more smoking years in their histories than women do, and because mortality rates are higher for former smokers than for lifetime nonsmokers. Much of the decrease in smoking among males in this country has occurred since 1964. It will take 30 to 50 years before men and women have about the same number of smoking years in their histories. At that time we predict there will be no longevity difference between male and female adults, provided traumatic deaths are ignored.

Dr. Sowder is also correct that females enjoy a "natural" mortality advantage over males at ages under 4 years. This advantage, which is believed to stem from genetic or hormonal differences, may not persist into adulthood, however. In our study, smoking habits account for all the MFLD above age 30, if traumatic deaths are ignored. The "natural" female advantage seems to have disappeared before age 30.

Our conclusion remains unchanged—the overwhelming cause of MFLD among adults is the devastating effect of smoking on health.

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